

Historiographical *Mots* in *The Menaechmi*

The Menaechmi, among Plautus' best known and most influential plays (cf. Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*), has never been securely dated. Its "metrical complexity" would seem to suggest a date close to 186 B.C.E. (Buck-1940). However, specific references within the play suggest various earlier dates (Hanson-1966). As desirable as it would be for philologists and students of Latin poetry to be able to slot each play properly into the Plautine corpus, knowing when and why a play was written is even more important to Roman historians and to Roman historiography of the late third and early second centuries B.C.E. (Leigh-2004).

Roman comedies, written for and performed at festivals popularly and enthusiastically celebrated by *totus populus Romanus*, undoubtedly reflect not only contemporary events but also the emotional "atmosphere" of a particular time (Gruen-1990; Harvey-1986). A close analysis of the types of language and situations presented, and persistently recurring, in *The Menaechmi* (language and situations not unique, but uniquely employed and emphasized here) strongly indicates that *The Menaechmi* was written to be performed soon after the conclusion of the Second Punic War, when—tensions eased—the Roman world collectively caught its breath and relaxed a bit. Soon, however, the Romans again began to look ahead (and outward), but now with an altered sense of *imperium* reflected in their writing of history (Strauss-2012), an *imperium* in which *amici* and *hostes* were distinguished primarily on the basis of their *fides*.

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